

MEMO

DATE: August 30, 2007

TO: Community, Economic and Human Development Committee

FROM: Peter Brandenburg, Senior Regional Planner
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SUBJECT: Los Angeles Times Articles on Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

BACKGROUND:

At the July 12, 2007 meeting of CEHD, Karen Gulley of The Planning Center, a consultant for SCAG working on Compass Blueprint projects, presented results of the Compass Blueprint Demonstration Projects planning for transit oriented development in Western Riverside County. Following the presentation, the Committee discussed a June 30, 2007 Los Angeles Times article that criticized the performance of transit-oriented developments in reducing auto trips and alleviating traffic congestion. Ms. Gulley stated that The Planning Center planned to submit a rebuttal to the article. While preparing to write the rebuttal, The Planning Center was contacted by the Times and solicited for input on a follow-up series of articles dealing with urban development, density and growth. Randall Jackson, President of The Planning Center, provided comments for this series and the first article appeared in the Sunday Times July 29, 2007.

Text of the following Los Angeles Times articles is attached here:


- June 30, 2007 "Near the rails but still on the road:" Original article critiquing performance of Los Angeles-area TODs.
- July 4, 2007 "Looking down the road on growth:" Three letters to the editor responding to the June 30 article.
- July 11, 2007 "Smart growth? Wise up:" Times editorial urging continued faith in TOD despite the June 30 article.
- July 29, 2007 "Urbanist explosion:" Features The Planning Center's Randall Jackson commenting on the emerging market for dense, urban housing options.
- August 6, 2007 "Southern California is becoming a tight fit:" Article noting the increasing share of multi-family housing construction in the region, with comments by SCAG Executive Director Mark Pisano.

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

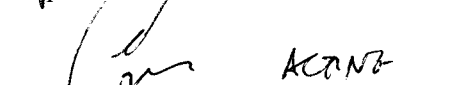
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From the Los Angeles Times

Near the rails but still on the road

Research casts doubt on the region's strategy of pushing transit-oriented residential projects to get people out of cars.

By Sharon Bernstein and Francisco Vara-Orta
Times Staff Writers

June 30, 2007

TV cameras in tow and champagne at the ready, a dozen of the county's most powerful civic leaders — including the mayor of Los Angeles, L.A. City Council members and county supervisors — touted the latest and glitziest new development in Hollywood: the planned W Hotel and apartments at the storied corner of Hollywood and Vine.

This project, they pledged at the groundbreaking earlier this year, would restore a sagging neighborhood while also minimizing traffic — an important promise in increasingly gridlocked Hollywood.

"People could live here and never use their cars," declared MTA Chief Executive Roger Snoble at the February event.

It's a vision expressed frequently by local government officials, who see building large mixed-use developments next to mass transit lines as a key solution for not just the region's traffic congestion but also its spread-out geography and reputation for being unfriendly to pedestrians.

In Los Angeles alone, billions of public and private dollars have been lavished on transit-oriented projects such as Hollywood & Vine, with more than 20,000 residential units approved within a quarter mile of transit stations between 2001 and 2005.

But there is little research to back up the rosy predictions. Among the few academic studies of the subject, one that looked at buildings in the Los Angeles area showed that transit-based development successfully weaned relatively few residents from their cars. It also found that, over time, no more people in the buildings studied were taking transit 10 years after a project opened than when it was first built.

Los Angeles, with its huge geographic footprint and its limited public transportation system, can't offer residents of these developments the kinds of sophisticated transit networks available in cities like Washington, D.C. — or even smaller ones like Portland — where transit-oriented projects are believed by many to be working.

The Times decided to examine driving habits at four apartment and condominium complexes that have already been built at or near transit stations in South Pasadena, North Hollywood, Pasadena and Hollywood.

Reporters spent two months interviewing residents, counting cars going out of and into the buildings and counting pedestrians walking from the projects to the nearby train stations.

The reporting showed that only a small fraction of residents shunned their cars during morning rush hour. Most people said that even though they lived close to transit stations, the trains weren't convenient enough, taking too long to arrive at destinations and lacking stops near their workplaces. Many complained that they didn't feel comfortable riding the MTA's crowded, often slow-moving buses from transit terminals to their jobs.

Moreover, the attraction of shops and cafes that are often built into developments at transit stations can actually draw more cars to neighborhoods, putting an additional traffic burden on areas that had been promised relief.

Harry Cosmatos, a Kaiser Permanente radiation oncologist, is exactly the type of educated, upscale commuter that planners and transportation experts want to draw via transit-oriented developments.

In 2005, he purchased a townhouse in a project built partly atop the Mission Meridian Gold Line station in South Pasadena.

He works at Kaiser Sunset, which is at a Red Line stop in Hollywood.

He loves his new home, with its craftsman touches and picturesque South Pasadena setting, in arguably the best-designed transit-oriented development in the region.

Cosmatos also likes the Gold Line — it reminds him of the village train near where he went to medical school on Long Island.

But the 36-year-old physician nevertheless drives to work.

The train?

"It's not for me," he said. "Maybe for other people, but not for me."

It takes two trains and at least 45 minutes to get to work on the Gold and Red lines, Cosmatos said.

Driving is 15 minutes faster, he said, and more convenient.

The problem — reluctantly recognized by some of transit-based development's most influential boosters — is that public transportation in Southern California is simply not convenient enough: Either it takes too long to get places or, more important, doesn't take people where they want to go.

The region's transit system is limited, experts say, because it was built on two assumptions that have since proved untrue: that most traffic was generated by commuting trips and that most people worked downtown.

Nowadays, people nationwide are driving so much to take their children to school, run errands and engage in other activities that these trips far outstrip commuting, according to federal transportation statistics.

To make matters worse, almost all of the transit-oriented construction that has so far been approved

in the L.A. area is for housing rather than job centers or the village-style shopping areas that planners had originally envisioned.

Barring significant changes, this could mean that tens of thousands of residents will be clustered near train stations they only occasionally use. For most shopping, schools and jobs, they'll still get in their cars.

Film student Isaiah Eller is a good example of the quandary.

The 21-year-old left two cars behind in Michigan, figuring he wouldn't need them when he moved to the Mark apartment building in Hollywood last year.

Just two blocks away from the Hollywood and Vine Red Line station in a neighborhood with plenty of restaurants and shops, Eller considered the vintage building of 101 units a perfect place to live without a car.

But after just a few months, he says he's so frustrated trying to get around Los Angeles on public transportation that he's thinking of bringing both vehicles out from the Midwest.

Using the system here took too long, didn't go where he needed and was unpleasant, he said.

"I've only ridden the bus three times, and that was enough," Eller said.

He's not alone. Although several residents of his building said they had given up their cars, about 30 of the 54 cars in the garage pulled out during morning rush hour.

But such realities haven't stopped or even slowed the wave of projects planned or under construction.

Huge developments in the pipeline include the L.A. Live and Grand Avenue projects downtown and hundreds of units around Metro stations in Hollywood, North Hollywood and the Mid-Wilshire areas.

Countywide, massive apartment and condominium complexes have been developed in Pasadena, South Pasadena, Long Beach and elsewhere.

Backers — who include planners, elected officials and builders — say such development is the best way to avoid a traffic meltdown as 6.3 million anticipated new residents crowd Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties over the next 30 years.

Moreover, the developments are appealing to young people and empty nesters because they have a neighborhood feel that traditional sprawling subdivisions often lack, said Gail Goldberg, planning director for the city of Los Angeles.

"You're seeing in California a whole trend toward moving into more urban settings," she said. "People like to walk around and go to a coffee shop, go to the movies. That is a very desirable way to live."

But does that mean people will stop using their cars?

Two related studies, both conducted by UC Berkeley and Cal Poly Pomona, show that people who live near transit tend to use it more than people who don't. But the number is still minuscule compared with the number who drive.

Residents were more likely to use transit only if it took less time than driving, if they could walk to their destinations from the transit stop when they arrived, if they had flexible work hours and if they had limited access to a car.

Otherwise, researchers said, most people tend to drive — particularly if they get free parking at their workplaces.

At the Pacific Court and Bellamar apartments in Long Beach, researchers found, just 6.3% of residents said they used the Metro Blue Line to go to work in 2003. More than 78% of the residents of the transit-based projects said they never used the line.

"The dilemma we have is the destinations," said Robert Cervero, a UC Berkeley urban planning professor who is coauthor of the two studies of transit-oriented developments.

Even though more people are living near transit stations, he said, in Southern California work and school sites are not necessarily near train and bus stops.

That's different from the older East Coast cities, where the urban grid is closely connected to the local transit system.

"That to me is the big difference as to why transit-oriented housing works a lot better in other parts of the world," Cervero said.

In other words, he and others said, in Southern California, the new, denser transit-based housing projects could actually lead to more congestion rather than less.

Take the development where Cosmatos, the cancer doctor, lives.

Before the 67-unit project was built, the land on which it stands held two bungalows, according to South Pasadena officials. If each household had two cars, that would mean a maximum of four cars going in and out each day.

But on the four days The Times counted cars entering and leaving the complex, the picture was quite different. From 6 to 9 a.m. on four weekdays earlier this year, 50 to 60 cars left the residents' parking lot. An additional 75 pulled into the streets around the development on each of the mornings so their drivers could patronize the coffee shop that is built into the project. Still more vehicles — about 50 by 9 a.m. — pulled into a parking lot at the development for people who drive there to use the nearby Gold Line station.

There is another issue facing transit-oriented development: Regional statistics gathered by the Southern California Assn. of Governments show that job centers are moving away from transit lines rather than toward them.

That's exactly what happened for construction industry worker Eric Johnson, who moved to South Pasadena's Mission Meridian project with the intention of taking the Gold Line to his job downtown.

But a few months ago, his company moved to Sun Valley — far from a transit line. So now Johnson drives.

The Times found similar results at the other locations surveyed.

At Academy Village in North Hollywood, which sits about a third of a mile from the North Hollywood transit station, about 120 cars left the building each morning, while fewer than half a dozen residents set off on foot.

In Pasadena, a 350-unit building sits directly over the Del Mar Gold Line station; it was two-thirds leased when The Times did its survey. Of 225 people who got off the train on a recent evening, just one, Cheanell Henderson, headed toward the apartment complex.

She loves the convenience of taking the Gold Line. But she's not so sure about her fellow tenants. "I save a lot of money on car expenses," Henderson said. "But I haven't met any neighbors on the train yet."

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From the Los Angeles Times

Looking down the road on growth

July 4, 2007

Re "Near the rails but on the road," June 30

This article failed to emphasize the projected 6.3 million more people expected to be living in the five-county area of Southern California in the next 30 years. Thus, growth is inevitable. The policy emphasis should be to place growth — both residential and employment — near public transit opportunities.

What should be clear, however, is that with millions more people living in Southern California, traffic congestion in the region will most assuredly be worse for many.

As individuals, however, we can make a choice to live near transit portals or close to where we work. This is why the thousands of dwelling units being built and planned at transit centers and downtown are a wise decision.

The alternative is to build suburban developments exclusively. This option has gotten us to where we are now — automobile-dependent with a ruinous quality of life.

JOEL B. MILLER

West Los Angeles

The writer is city planner and vice president of Psomas, a Los Angeles-based civil engineering and planning firm.

•

I wish planners would stop claiming that transit-oriented development will reduce traffic. It never has and never will. In desirable urban areas, traffic goes down only when the costs of gasoline, parking, tolls, etc. go up.

Road traffic will continue to increase everywhere that congestion hasn't already ground it to a near halt. We will need another way to get around town. How many people initially use each new section of a comprehensive rail system that will take decades to build is immaterial.

Transit-oriented is "the best way to avoid a traffic meltdown" because someday soon, for many people, driving is no longer going to be a viable option.

TODD BINKLEY

Ventura

•

If our rails do not serve enough job centers, let's complete the centerpiece project we were promised by Proposition A in 1980 [a voter-approved countywide rail transit system financed by a half-cent increase in the sales tax in L.A. County]: the Wilshire subway.

ROGER CHRISTENSEN

Sherman Oaks

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From the Los Angeles Times

EDITORIAL

Smart growth? Wise up

Though the concept hasn't delivered on its promise of getting us out of our cars, that doesn't mean it's a failure.

July 11, 2007

SMART GROWTH, we want so badly to believe in you. You were centrally planned by the greatest minds of our time, conceived in an atmosphere of collective purpose and self-criticism, built to the greenest specifications and fired by a bold vision: victory over the individual will and the creation of a new citizenry for a new century.

If only you would work.

A recent Times look at how four "smart-growth" or "transit-oriented" developments (TODs) have transformed local traffic patterns raised the dismaying possibility that they may be doing the opposite of what advocates promised. New Urbanist planners have long hoped that building high-density, mixed-use, multiple-unit developments on or near public transit lines would encourage Angelenos to leave their cars and start taking buses and trains. Instead, the properties that Times reporters studied have substantially increased vehicular traffic.

Evidence for TODs' ability to reduce congestion has been failing to pile up for quite some time. According to Federal Highway Administration statistics, between 1990 and 2000, during which time the Metropolitan Transportation Authority introduced the Blue, Green and Red lines, the percentage of L.A. residents taking mass transit — bus and rail combined — increased from a paltry 4.5% to a measly 4.6%. Since then, statistics haven't been much more encouraging. The best evidence is that TODs may produce some marginal percentage increases in transit ridership — and these percentage increases are swamped by the large numbers of new residents and shoppers attracted by high-density, mixed-use developments.

A growing region needs housing, and this alone may be justification for the billions of public and private dollars that are being spent on new multi-unit developments. But the magical thinking that has informed so much of this development — the belief that, in the words of one New Urbanist manifesto, "transit, pedestrian and bicycle systems should maximize access and mobility throughout the region while reducing dependence upon the automobile" — has failed, at least so far, to prove itself on the ground.

Still, if the TODs that are radically transforming Hollywood, downtown and other neighborhoods have not compelled people to change their behavior, they do have the potential to attract the kind of residents who seek a traditional walking-around urban experience. Reducing the rate of

congestion growth will require a vast array of policy solutions and options for residents, and smart growth may be part of that.

We still want to believe.

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From the Los Angeles Times

Urbanist explosion

Realtors are paying attention to a growing group of buyers who want hip, higher-density living in pleasant surroundings -- like Hollywood, not downtown.

By Diane Wedner

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

July 29, 2007

Living in suburbia is as appealing to Katherine Winston as a prime-rib dinner is to a vegetarian.

"There will always be people with suburban tastes," said the 30-year-old television-marketing manager. "I definitely am not one of them."

That's why she and her Realtor husband, Darren Winston, 30, are moving into Kor Group's Sunset Silver Lake loft-style condominiums in Los Angeles, one of several new residential projects in Southern California geared to what marketers are calling "nouveau" buyers -- those roughly between the ages of 25 and 45 who want an urban environment but don't necessarily dig downtown.

This shared desire to be urbanists while avoiding the urban hub has been recognized by the building industry, which is jumping onboard with condo conversions, lofts and apartments in areas once considered residentially undesirable. In the vicinity of Hollywood and Vine alone, 2,500 upscale condos and apartments will soon be available.

"Urbanists can walk or take a bike to restaurants, pick up their newspaper downstairs, but don't have to deal with the inconveniences of downtown blight," said Randy Jackson, president of the Planning Center, a private urban-design firm in Costa Mesa.

For this emerging niche market of buyers, decisions about where they live far outweigh what they're living in.

"There's been a sea change in preference, from product to place," said Shyam Kannan, director of research and development for RCLCO, a nationwide real estate consulting firm. "Place is much more important."

In Southern California, those "places" filling the bill include Silver Lake, Hollywood, Marina del Rey, Fullerton and Pasadena -- towns boasting hip, higher-density living in pleasant surroundings.

These buyers -- mostly Generation Xers (ages 27 to 42) as well as adventurous boomers (43 to

61) and some from Generation Y (26 and younger) -- want neighborhoods with ethnic diversity; flexible indoor space; communal outdoor living areas; ground-floor retail; nearby bars, clubs, restaurants and culture; and a place to grab coffee on a Sunday morning that's just a few steps away.

"These are educated, sophisticated buyers who want to connect with neighbors," said Lupe Sanchez, marketing manager for John Laing Homes Urban, which broke ground in March 2006 on Ma- drone, a 180-unit development of studios, flats and penthouses ranging in size from 700 to 2,300 square feet just south of the Hollywood Boulevard and La Brea Avenue junction. "They care about the lifestyle, not which counter tops and flooring they're getting."

It's a movement that appears to be gaining momentum. According to a 2006 analysis of housing-preference estimates by Arthur C. Nelson, director of urban affairs and planning at Virginia Tech, 38% of today's consumers prefer attached housing, compared with 25.4% historically. And although 54.2% of today's occupied homes are single-family detached structures on large lots, the percentage of consumers who actually want that is as low as 25%.

"Across demographics, people of all ages living in large homes in spread-out neighborhoods said they don't like it," RCLCO's Kannan said of the analysis of thousands of respondents. "People are seeking others to socialize with."

Although plugged in by computers and cellphones, Katherine Winston says that her peer group wants to be part of a social network and "not just the 500 friends on MySpace. We want to actually live close to our friends."

The Winstons recently bought a 1,324-square-foot, two-bedroom loft for \$650,000 in Silver Lake. The new development is made up of 43 single-, two- and three-level units in four buildings connected by landscaped courtyards and featuring patios and balconies. Two of Katherine's work colleagues live in Silver Lake, so she can carpool to work, a bonus.

A stone's throw from Sunset Junction -- the area where Sunset and Griffith Park boulevards come together -- the Winstons will have access to the weekly farmers markets, annual street fair and the nearby Casbah Café, where they can dine alfresco and mingle with neighbors.

"We've always been adamant about living in or very near the city," Winston said.

If Silver Lake is high on the coolness curve, then Hollywood and Vine is off the charts. Clubs, restaurants, theater and history converge there, attracting condo buyers to the converted Equitable office building.

The fabled corner also is where the Kor Group has turned the landmark Broadway department store, built in 1927, into Broadway Hollywood, a 96-unit loft complex set to open early next month. Most of the lofts are 1,300 to 1,400 square feet, with expansive windows that take in views of the Capitol Records building, the Hollywood Hills, the Pantages Theater and the Westside. Katsuya restaurant and a Pinkberry will occupy part of the ground floor. The building will have a doorman and valet parking. All but five of the units have been sold.

The Broadway Hollywood lofts feature stainless-steel kitchen appliances, 1930s-style penny tile in the bathroom, red-oak floors with walnut stain and walk-in closets. Prices range from

\$500,000 for the smallest lofts to just under \$3 million for a 2,200-square-foot penthouse. The roof, open to all residents, has cabanas, an outdoor fireplace, pool, Jacuzzi, a fitness room and big views.

Sanju Surtani, 35, an agent for a real estate marketing and sales company, recently kicked her single lifestyle up a notch by leaving the small rental house she shared near the Grove shopping center and buying her own 1,263-square-foot Broadway Hollywood loft, which listed at \$820,000.

"My friends and I find this lifestyle easier," Surtani said. "We work a lot, and in our time off it feels like we're in a hotel. We have a real connection to the city."

For those who find that part of town too noisy and crowded, Element in Marina del Rey has urban amenities but comes with ocean breezes too. Developed to appeal to the sensibilities of the "creative class"-- architects, designers, writers, artists, actors -- this John Laing Homes development of 50 lofts (and 77 condos at its neighboring project, Indigo) is for "people who love the loft look but don't want downtown L.A.," said Kathy Kerr, director of sales for Laing's Los Angeles/Ventura division. Construction will be completed early next year.

About 64% of Element buyers are single, and 70% are under age 40. The five-story concrete buildings are short on personal storage space but give owners options for creating flexible interior spaces. Buyers can walk to Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice and are minutes by car from LAX.

Leo Ulrich, 40, a marketer for a dinnerware company, currently lives in a Hancock Park house and said he can't wait to get into his 1,150-square-foot Element loft, which he purchased for \$500,000; the remaining 10 or so available units now go for about \$600,000. Indigo condos originally listed for the high \$400,000s.

"I gave up on every other place I was looking at," said Ulrich, who travels often. "It's the exact location, price and eclectic group I like."

Much to the surprise of designers, nouveau buyers are not impressed by the bells and whistles that typify high-end, new-home features, such as remote controls for turning on ovens.

More important to these buyers is the flexibility of space they get in lofts and high-ceilinged condos.

Above all, nouveau buyers just want a neighborhood vibe.

"In the 1950s, the American Dream was 'Leave it to Beaver,' " consultant Kannan said. "Today it's 'Friends,' 'Seinfeld' and 'Grey's Anatomy.' We like to be around people."

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From the Los Angeles Times

Southern California is becoming a tight fit

As more apartments and condos are built, traffic won't be the region's only kind of jam.

By Sharon Bernstein
Times Staff Writer

August 6, 2007

When Bing Crosby crooned that he would settle down and "make the San Fernando Valley my home," he wasn't singing about apartments.

The Southern California dream back then — exemplified by the World War II-era tracts popping up in the Valley and other places — was of an affordable single-family home, a little house on a patch of green where kids could play out back.

But today, construction of condos and apartments is rapidly overtaking that of single-family residences, even in suburbs known for spread-out living.

It's part of a broader shift to urbanized living in Southern California, a change that brings with it significantly higher density and concerns about overcrowding and traffic.

Consider the Valley: In the 1940s, developers there and throughout the region were putting up houses wherever they could, plowing under vegetable fields and planting that dream along streets and cul-de-sacs.

But over the last six years, Los Angeles has approved more than 14,000 condos and apartments for construction in the San Fernando Valley, according to city records, nearly three times the number of single-family residences.

It's a trend that is mirrored throughout the region, and it is expected to intensify as Southern California stretches to accommodate a crush of 6.3 million new residents over the next 30 years.

So many new apartments will be built that by 2035, the number of multi-family dwellings under construction will outstrip the number of single-family residences two to one, according to projections by the Southern California Assn. of Governments.

The shift is starkly obvious in Los Angeles County, where 60% of residences built in 1993 were single-family. Last year in the county, 38% of residential construction was single-family and 62% was apartments and condos.

The increase in apartment and condominium dwellings will dramatically reshape the way people live in Southern California, heralding an era of increasing urbanization for residents used to

suburbia.

Even in such traditionally wide-open areas as Riverside and Orange counties, the number of permits issued for multi-family housing has nearly tripled since 1999.

Apartments and condos have already overtaken the construction of single-family residences in Orange County, where so far this year developers have started work on twice as many multi-family units as individual houses.

The shift has implications for infrastructure, congestion, schools and even the style of neighborhoods, as apartments encroach on single-family enclaves.

Top planners say that if cities and counties are not careful about where they place these high-density projects, the development could overcrowd schools, burden water, sewer and power systems and make traffic worse.

Perhaps nowhere is this clash causing more controversy than along the southern stretch of Ventura Boulevard in the Valley.

In the Sherman Oaks-Studio City area alone, 2,300 apartments and condos were approved for construction between 2000 and 2006.

Neighbors there are already feeling cramped.

"What we have is a city in crisis," said Ellen Vukovich, a board member of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Assn. "I don't know how long the homeowners are going to be able to stem the tide."

In Studio City, where mid-century houses and small apartment buildings are being replaced by mega-condo projects, residents are worried that the village-like nature of the community will be squashed under a crush of large new buildings and thousands of new residents.

As many as 1,600 new apartments or condos have been built or planned there in the last two years alone, and efforts are underway to produce 1,021 more units, according to figures gathered by neighborhood activists.

Already, traffic on streets leading to Ventura Boulevard in Studio City is backed up for several hours each day.

A Times search of city traffic records shows that at the same time many new developments were being planned and built in the southern end of the Valley, traffic at 10 major intersections along the boulevard worsened.

Ironically, residents along Ventura Boulevard nearly two decades ago fought construction of high-rise office towers there. The battle ended with stricter zoning rules, but they apply only to commercial development, not to residential.

"We're just trying very hard to preserve some semblance of human-scale life here," said Barbara Burke, who is a vice president of the Studio City Neighborhood Council but who said she was

speaking as a homeowner. "The congestion is huge."

Similar debates are going on elsewhere in Southern California as more high-density projects take root.

In Orange County, builders have put up more apartments and condos than houses for nearly two years, said Kristine Thalman, chief executive of the Building Industry Assn.'s Orange County chapter.

Driving the shift, Thalman said, is affordability: Condos and apartments are cheaper to build than houses, largely because less land is required per unit.

They are also cheaper to sell or rent, and with the median price of a single-family residence in Orange County at \$724,000, many potential buyers can afford only condos, she said. They also appeal to younger buyers.

"They can live in a high-rise, go downstairs to a bar and restaurant and go to the baseball game," she said.

For the most part, the shift has been embraced by planners, elected officials and developers, who say that despite the region's history as a haven for people who moved west to escape the cramped apartments of their metropolitan hometowns, Southern Californians should expect a future that is denser and more urban.

With new construction placed near transit hubs, schools and commercial districts, these officials say, traffic will be minimized, and the region will still be able to accommodate millions of new residents.

"We need to start changing our approach from a suburban model to an urban model," Los Angeles City Councilman Ed Reyes told planners and housing experts at a recent conference.

But Mark Pisano, executive director of the Southern California Assn. of Governments, said many municipalities, including Los Angeles, have allowed significant amounts of very high-density development in places where there is little access to the types of amenities — like public transportation — that will encourage residents to get out of their cars.

However, evidence seems to suggest that even if such developments were placed near public transportation, the system in Southern California is so limited that most residents would use their cars anyway.

And that, Pisano said, could lead to serious problems as Los Angeles and other cities continue to concentrate dense development in places where public transportation is not efficient.

"If you put density everywhere, you get gridlock," he said.

According to the SCAG forecast, which was based on planned construction for Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties, about 2.5 million new residences of varying types will be built in the region by 2035.

The vast majority of the units will be condominiums, apartments and town houses. The trend is already evident.

In 1993, for example, the number of single-family residences under construction vastly outstripped the number of apartments and condominiums, as developers put up 22,414 houses and 8,662 multi-family units, according to the Construction Industry Research Board, which keeps records of building permits issued in the state.

In Los Angeles County that year, 60% of residences were single-family. And in less built-out areas like Riverside and Ventura counties, fewer than 300 multi-family units were built in 1993, compared to thousands of detached houses.

By last year, however, the percentage of single-family dwellings built in the five-county SCAG region had dropped to 64%, with 48,683 houses and 27,580 condominiums and apartments.

Vukovich, of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Assn., said plenty of people still want to live in quiet single-family neighborhoods and worry that their ability to do so will be reduced as more condos are built.

"They've all bought into this idea that people are going to want to live in New York in Southern California," she said.

Others argue that changes are not as dramatic as some might fear.

Jane Blumenfeld, L.A.'s principal planner, said the city is not going down that road. She noted that for the most part, the city's plans call for buildings three to five stories tall along major streets where the existing buildings are one story tall.

"That's far from Manhattan," Blumenfeld said.

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